

VETERANS' SERVICES

Fiscal Year 2007

The Department of Veterans' Services continues to offer assistance to veterans and their families through a number of federal and state programs. The state veterans' benefit program provides temporary assistance to veterans and their families who qualify to receive benefits and can show need. These benefits provide for medical care and cash for living expenses.

The Department of Veterans' Services will also aid veterans and their families in the filing of federal forms that are necessary for them to receive a wide range of benefits provided by the Veterans' Administration. The Department now has access to many veteran-related internet sites and government agencies.

FISCAL YEAR 2007

The Welcome Home Bill II was enacted on May 16, 2007. The legislation is a successor bill to the comprehensive Veterans' Benefit Package signed last year.

This bill

- allows municipalities to charge less than eight percent (8%) interest when a real estate property tax deferral is granted to active military personnel who have a financial hardship due to being deployed
- allows a military spouse to renew a temporary certificate at no expense during the spouse's period of active military duty
- codifies the case-by-case determination that allows a military spouse to receive unemployment insurance if his or her spouse is permanently reassigned out of Massachusetts, and
- extends any professional license that may expire because of active military duty until 90 days after discharge from active military service, and waives any associated renewal fee.

Another program that has been enacted this year is the Military Enhanced Relief Individual Tax (MERIT) Plan. This plan generally expands property tax and motor vehicle excise exemptions available to veterans with service-connected disabilities.

The new administration of Patrick-Murray has re-activated the Advisory Council on Veterans' Services. The Governor's Advisory Council was re-activated by executive order in April and is meant to review and assess State and federal statutes and programs related to veterans and the delivery of services to veterans, including health care, education, housing, outreach, training and retraining. The Council also will educate the people of the Commonwealth and their elected and appointed officials regarding issues of importance to the Commonwealth's veterans.

The Memorial Parade and Ceremony this year was well attended and the weather held out. We were fortunate to have a fly-by from the Warthogs (A-10's) stationed at Barnes Air Reserve Base, this being the last year that they will be in our area.

The Veterans' Services Department, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 754, American Legion Post 148, and the UMass Veterans' Group in Amherst created an informal advisory committee to locally address issues regarding veterans. It is but the first step in the ongoing process to voice our concerns in regards to returning veterans, and how we all can serve them.

Roderick Raubeson, Veterans' Agent for the Town of Amherst for 18 years, retired on March 31, 2007. Kathleen Pollard was appointed the new Veterans' Agent for the Town.